

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Severo Dinson, 77, former plantation worker, boxer, coffee picker, and coffee farmer

"Kona, good only for season time. But no more season, hard time, because no more job. Only hō hana, no 'nough for eat in Kona. If during season time, all right, you can make money, little bit. But no more season, no can make money. . . . Sometime, I make ten bag. Ten bag, six bag, yeah. But two dollar, one bag, before. But after that, the other year, he come down dollar quarter [\$1.25]."

Severo Dinson, Visayan, was born on May 20, 1904 in Cebu, Philippines. He came to Hawaii in 1922 and worked on the Big Island's Papaaloa Sugar Plantation.

In 1927, Severo came to Kona and picked coffee for several farmers. He also became a boxer.

In 1936, when coffee prices were low, Severo and his wife moved to Honokaa Plantation. Twelve years later, they returned to Kona and farmed coffee on leased lands.

Today, Severo and his wife live in Kealia, Kona. He is active in the Kona Filipino Community Association.

Tape No. 9-15-1-80
ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Severo Dinson (SD)

November 13, 1980

Kealia, Kona, Hawaii

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN)

WN: This is an interview with Mr. Severo Dinson. Today is November 13, 1980, and we're at his home in Kealia, Kona, Hawaii.

Okay, Mr. Dinson, can you tell me when you were born?

SD: Nineteen four. May 20, 1904.

WN: Where were you born?

SD: Carcar, Cebu.

WN: What kind work your father and mother was doing?

SD: On the land. Planting corn.

WN: What else they plant? Only corn?

SD: Corn, yeah. And banana. That's all.

WN: How many acres you had?

SD: I think, about ten acre. Ten acre, because we get the rice field.

WN: You had brothers and sisters?

SD: Oh, yeah. Before I got. But now, all gone.

WN: Altogether, how many?

SD: Five boys and two girls. [SD was the youngest.]

WN: The corn and the banana your parents had, they sold it to people or was for their own use?

SD: Yeah. That's my own use.

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

WN: You know, the other people who lived in the area where you lived, they was doing same kind work?

SD: Oh, yeah. You mean to say, the plantation?

WN: No, no. People living in Philippines, around where you used to live. What kind work they was doing?

SD: Yeah. Same kind. They work on the land. They get their own land. They plant rice. Mostly corn and rice. But banana, only on the side.

WN: You know, the village you grew up in, how many houses had?

SD: Which one? The Philippines? I think too much, you know. No can count, that's why. I never count. Too much. Too much house. Even the time I go over there. That house I stay. Line up, you know. Just like town. Visit my sister.

WN: About how many people had, you think?

SD: I think, the people, not so much already. Because all the (tape garbled) kaukau, eh? The people. You understand what I mean? Some people, they move, go Mainland. Mostly, they come Hawaii. Go here and there, you know.

WN: What kind house you lived in, Philippines?

SD: (Chuckles) Bamboo. Bamboo house. Yes, that's not bullshit. Just like coconut leaf, eh?

WN: For the top?

SD: Yeah.

WN: What about the floor?

SD: Floor, some bamboo and some. . . . Something crawl by you underneath the bamboo. Somebody crawl in. . . . (Laughs)

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

WN: What about food? What kind food you ate?

SD: Oh, rice. Rice and fish. And that's all.

WN: You lived near the ocean?

SD: Oh, yeah. We near the ocean. No more one mile.

WN: What school you went to?

SD: I told you I never go school. I don't know how to write my name. I don't know how come they put me president of the Philippines of America [Kona Filipino Community Association]. (Laughs)

WN: You never go any year of school?

SD: Only one week.

WN: How come you never go?

SD: You know, like me, as the youngest of my family, if I tell my father I no go school, they no push. You know, Philippine Islands, they no push. That's why, I don't know nothing. If I go school, I think, maybe, I come smart or what. Like my wife, all right. Because my wife did go school in the Philippines. That's why, this time, now, I [no] worry because I no go school.

Before, I tell you true. Before that time I come new one in Hawaii-- new man--I no understand what they stay talking about. They told me "daun bilo" [down below], but I don't know what is "daun bilo." Sometimes, they talk Spanish, all right. I understand little bit Spanish. He told me "abajo," all right, go down. "Arriba," go up. I understand that one.

That's why, hard, if you no go school. That's why, my kids, I tell all my kids, "Mo' betta you fella go school. No copy your father. Your father, he don't know nothing."

Lucky thing, I come in Hawaii. Any kind English, I understand. In fact, I interpret over there. The courthouse over there.

WN: What courthouse?

SD: Yeah. Because any kind talk--what kind he talk--I understand. That's why I [no] worry that I no go school. I [no] worry I don't know nothing. He no believe, you know. The Portuguese--my luna in the plantation. Papaaloe Plantation. He no believe I no go school.

"How come? You're not Filipino." He told me, "You not Filipino."

"No, I'm Filipino."

"No, no, no, no, no. I think you're Spanish."

"No. I'm Filipino."

But my father mix up, already. Before, the first time, the Philippines [under] Spanish rule, eh? That's why, from that time, my [Spanish] grandpa, he go with the Filipino girl. That's why, my [father is] half-Filipino. Mix up already. Pretty soon, Hawaiian. (Laughs)

WN: So, your luna told you, you look like Spanish?

SD: Yeah, yeah, yeah. He no believe that I am Filipino.

WN: What kind work you did around your father's place to help your father?

SD: We clean the land. This hō hana--called hō hana in Hawaii. That's all. I clean the land. And planting, too. Corn. Get some banana. We no sell that one. Only for eat, you know. That's why, that's all da kine job. Take care the plant. That's all.

WN: Since you never go school, you work all day?

SD: No. Me, number one kolohe. I go (chuckles) anyplace. My father, he no bother me, you know. Yeah, he no lick me. My father, he no lick me, nothing. I'm the youngest of the family. That's why, I don't know nothing, I don't care.

My schoolteacher, he told me, "Severo, how come you no come school?"

"I no like."

He no like lick, my father. He no like lick me. That's why, now, I stay happy now, we don't know nothing. So, I tell my kids that, "You fella, no follow to me. Like me, I don't know nothing. You gotta go school. Because if you ask [for] job here in Hawaii, they ask [for] your diploma. If you get diploma, all right. You can get good job. But if no more diploma, nothing. You gotta go picking coffee." That's why, my kids, some, smart, though.

But anyway, even my kid, he no graduate all. But good head, all mechanical--mechanic. I think if you know that little garage [service station] over there, that's my boy's, that one. Yeah, that one, busy like hell, the garage. Yeah, that's my boy, that one. My kid, only two, they graduate. I get ten kids. Nine is still alive. But only two, they graduate. They married young, you know. That's why, my wife, she cry. Because she like they continue go school. Because the principal teacher, she bin tell us, "Why you fella like quit--your kids--for go school? Because your kids smart." But they like quit. But my wife, she cry. She no like they quit.

But, you know, my boy, I bin tell my boy, "How come you like quit?"

"I no like."

So, no can help. If they no study, pohō, only the kaukau (chuckles).

WN: You said you was kolohe boy?

SD: Who?

WN: You.

SD: Before, young time, yeah.

WN: What kind things you did? Instead of working in your father's fields, you. . . .

SD: Yeah, yeah. No, my father, he no push me for work, you know. He no push me for work.

Only he told me, "Ah, go help for clean the land."

"Yeah, okay. Okay. I go."

Bumbai, I think, I work about one hour, I lost already. I go someplace else. (Laughs)

WN: So, what you did when you go play around?

SD: I guess only play. You know this kind marble? (Chuckles) Only da kine, play marbles. Yeah, that's all. If hungry, go home, go eat. But my father, he no [get] wild [and ask], "Where you went?" Only love, my father. That's why, I no worry, that time.

WN: You folks had church activities? You went church?

SD: Oh, yeah. Philippine Islands, every day, you know, I go church. Every day, I go church in Philippine Islands. But here, you know why I no go church? Because I see all the girls that all bikini. I no like. You pray to God, more worse you get punished to the God, because you look only the. . . . You know what I mean, eh? Yeah, that kind, no good. That's why, I (chuckles) no like da kine. Mo' betta, I no go [church].

WN: But in Philippines, you went every day?

SD: Oh, yeah. Philippine Islands, yeah, every day. We go church every day, before. But in Hawaii, the time I no married yet--I was boxing yet, that time--I go church every time. Because I pray to God that he give me power so that I win the fight. Every day. One week--whole week--I go, morning time, every morning, go church.

WN: In Philippines, you went every morning?

SD: No, only Sunday.

WN: In Philippines?

SD: Yeah. Only Sunday. But here, near to the church, my house. Because when I go run, practice, when I come back, go change the clothes, and then I go church. But now I married, I no go church already.

WN: Philippines, the church was near your house?

SD: Far, you know. I think, about ten miles, I think, no? From my house. About one hour, I think, go walk.

WN: Hour walk?

SD: Yeah, because no more car. Poor, in the Philippines. Poor, no more money. That's why, you gotta work hard, so you get money when you go back in the Philippines. You get money already.

WN: You had job in Philippines?

SD: Oh, yeah. If you work, you get job.

WN: You went work?

SD: Yeah, I work on my land--my father's land. That's all. I no work outside. No, I bin work in the railroad. Yeah, I work railroad. Only about eight months, I think, that time. And then, I come home.

WN: Railroad? What you did, railroad?

SD: Clean the rails. Hemo the grass--hō hana the grass. That's all.

WN: This in your village in Cebu?

SD: Oh, yeah. Yeah, I work railroad, about eight months, I think. Because my brother stay working in the boat. Just like drive the boat. And then, the time he come home, he wild like hell. He no like I work the railroad, because heavy job. I'm young yet.

WN: How old you was?

SD: Only 17. Heavy job, you know. No can help. Only three quarters, only. You work (chuckles), you know.

WN: How much one day?

SD: Three quarters. Seventy-five cents. Three quarters, that's double, already, eh? But that one, only 75 cents, Philippine money. Seventy-five centavos, they call 75 cents.

(SD speaks with wife.)

WN: You had 75 cents in American money?

SD: No, Philippine, money.

WN: Oh, 75 pesos?

SD: No, 75 centavos. If American money, ho, good money already.
(Laughs)

WN: So, you go hoe the grass. What else you did?

SD: Go pull the grass, pull the grass.

WN: That's all?

SD: Yeah, that's all. And, the railroad, some is spoil, the lumber.
Gotta change, the lumber.

WN: What kind lumber?

SD: The lumber. You know, the train? Go on top over there; they pass.
And you put lumber [across the tracks]. They put road---railroad.
That's my job.

WN: Oh, you laid the track, then?

SD: Not truck, you know. Train. You understand what is train, eh?

WN: Train?

SD: Yeah, that's the one.

WN: But get the track, eh?

SD: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. I misunderstand. (Chuckles)

WN: How many hours, one day, you work?

SD: (Chuckles) Six [a.m.] to 6 [p.m.]. Not by hour, you know, in the
Philippines. You start 6 o'clock [a.m.]; you pau hana at 6 o'clock
[p.m.]. That's why, heavy---hard life.

WN: Did you like the work?

SD: In the Philippines?

WN: Yeah.

SD: Ay, I no like. Small money. That's why (chuckles) I run away from
there. I no like that kind work. But no can help. You poor man,
you gotta work. Bumbai, you no work, you no more kaukau.

WN: The money that you got from working railroad, you gave to your
father?

SD: Oh, yeah, yeah. I gave all to my father. And then, my father, he
give me back some for buy something, like that. Yeah. That's the
Filipino style, you know. When you got money--you under the hand

of your father yet--when you got money, you'll give to your father. You give to the father. Not like Hawaii, if you work, you got money, you put your own pocket. But in the Philippines, as long you single yet, you gotta give your father all of your money.

WN: When you was in Philippines, how you heard about Hawaii?

SD: Oh, I got cousin who come from Hawaii. I get cousin, he come from Hawaii. So, he told story to me--this and that, this and that. That's why, I think, good. But that time I asked to my cousin who come from Hawaii, I was young yet. [SD was 18.] So, he told me that, "You cannot go because you. . . . They take if got 20 years old." That's why, kinda hard. (Chuckles)

WN: What your cousin told you about Hawaii? You remember?

SD: He said, "Hawaii good." Hawaii good. That's what they said, Hawaii good. That's why I come Hawaii. Because Hawaii, he said, "If you going Hawaii, you go in the cane field. You go cut cane, hāpai." That's dollar a day. If you go day work, they give you dollar a day. But if you make contract, by pound--how many pound, they count, eh? You cut cane, hāpai--bundles. That's why, sometimes, you make dollar, dollar half, like that, one day. If you make 23 days [i.e., work at least 23 days a month]--before--you make 23 days, then you get bonus, ten cents a day. If you make only 22 days, I no more nothing. That's why, you gotta work hard. (Laughs) No more bonus if no more 23 days. Yeah, that's how, life. Hard, before, I tell you, boy.

WN: Yeah. You thought was good, then?

SD: Oh, yeah. I thought was good already, because double, huh? Before, only half, you know. You get one dollar over here, you get two pesos in the Philippines. Not like now. You get one dollar over here, you get seven pesos in the Philippines. How many that one? You get \$1,000 over here, [it's worth] \$7,000 in the Philippines. You see? Big shot, already. (Laughs) That's why, me, I tell you true. Like now, if our [Philippines] president [was] good, I go home in the Philippines. Yeah, I go home the Philippines. If I go home the Philippine Islands, I be big shot already. See, I sell this one, somebody like buy [for] \$100,000, you know.

WN: Your property now?

SD: Yeah, this is my own property. But I no like sell. Because if I make and no more this one, I think, my kid, he forget me. That's why I no sell. So many haoles come around. "We like buy."

"No, no, no. I no like sell."

WN: So, 1922, you came Hawaii, yeah?

SD: Yeah, 1922. Month of May.

WN: Other people from your town was going Hawaii, too?

SD: Yeah. Plenty people, they come Hawaii. Before, only little bit Ilocano, you know. Mostly Visaya. But now, hardly you find Visaya. Mostly Ilocano. That's why, I tell you, before, this [Kona] Filipino community before, plenty Visaya, yet, strong, you know. Look the picture over there. All Visaya, that one.

WN: In Kona?

SD: In Kona. Only three haole, I think, stay over there. That's why, we strong, yet. Visaya go cooperate together. But like this Ilocano, ah. Can you understand what is Filipino community? That's why, sometime, we get the party over here, I tell you. Like you folks, Filipino, no need invite [invitation]. You come. Because there is Filipino community. No think that you fella not members. You are a member of the Filipino community. But, you know, already, Filipino, hard time to understand.

WN: You had to pay money to come over here?

SD: Oh, no. Before, plantation pay--free. In fact, you got contract, you work three year in the plantation, you get free to go back in the Philippines. But now, I come, 1922. How many year now I stay Hawaii? (Chuckles)

WN: Fifty-eight years?

SD: Yeah, I think, about that. Forget already, the Philippines. But Hawaii, to me, it's good. Very good. I like Hawaii. If you got money, you can make business. Any kind business, you can make business. But in the Philippines, the president would take 'em, pocket 'em himself.

WN: So, you didn't have any money with you when you came over here?

SD: No, they give. They give ten dollar, one head. The plantation, they give ten dollar, one. They give, they call "bonus." Ten dollar one.

WN: Oh, like advance?

SD: Yeah, yeah. But that one, you no pay [back]. Just give, only.

WN: When you started work in the plantation, you had to earn the ten dollars?

SD: No, no, no.

WN: That's extra?

SD: Yeah, extra. Yeah. That one, they give free.

WN: What kind things you brought with you when you came to Hawaii?

SD: Ah, no more nothing. Only clothes. Only clothes, I think. You no can bring nothing, eh? (Laughs) You no can bring machine gun.

(Laughter)

SD: They look everything, you know, when you come on.

WN: How you felt about leaving Philippines and your family?

SD: Hard. Hard, because if no more job, no more kaukau. You gotta move for find job. So you can eat every time. If you get land, like that, you plant something. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Like my father, my father get land. No worry. But the one no more land. . . . (SD makes praying gesture.)

WN: They begging?

SD: There's money if you do that. He pray, and there's money. Mostly like that. But like us, that's not bullshit, I think. Not bullshit. My father no more hard time. That's why, if my father and my mother stay alive yet, maybe I go back. But now, no more. I no like go back now. Maybe I go visit. Three time, I go, already, the Philippines. Visit over there, but I no understand. Beside that, oh, my brother make over there. Last week, I bin receive one letter from my nephew. My brother died last week. Pau already. No more brother, no more sister. So I no stay in the Philippines. Maybe I go, only look. Only visit now. Beside that, I'm [American] citizen already. (Laughs)

WN: What was the name of the boat you came on?

SD: President Lincoln.

WN: The boat left from where?

SD: I think, the boat from Mainland. From Mainland, that boat, it go get over there, the people.

WN: From Manila?

SD: Yeah. One month, you know, the boat. From Manila, to come Hawaii. One month. Lucky thing, the President Lincoln strong, fast. But Japan boat, ah, little more--three month, two month. Slow. But American boat is strong, you know. Plenty, they make, you know. You throw out, eh? Bumbai, make.

WN: How many guys make on that?

SD: Three. One small boy. But me, I no feel dizzy, because every time, I go on boat, eh? We get boat--small kind boat. That's why, used to, already, for ride boat, like that.

WN: What you did on the [small] boat?

SD: Fishing. Yeah, fishing. I buy bamboo. (Laughs) Yeah, fishing.

WN: What you did with the fish?

SD: Well, we ate. We ate, that's all. Some, if get plenty, he sell 'em. But mostly, only enough for eat. (Laughs) That's why, in the Philippines, hard. Hard in the Philippines.

WN: Had other kind people [who had] boat?

SD: No, get Korean, like that, but only Philippines. No more different. . . . No more Americano, no more Portuguese, no more. Only Philippines--Filipinos. Japanese, got before. That time, no war time, eh? I was young yet, eh? Yeah, plenty Japanese, you know. Get plenty Japanese, before, in the Philippines. Because, before, the America, he holding the Philippines. America, they no bother us. You can do what you like as long you no make trouble. You can make business what you like. As long as [you have] money for make business. Not like now. Yeah, now, no can make business.

WN: You know, the boat, get different sections, eh? What part you folks stayed? [WN's question refers to SD's experiences on the boat coming to Hawaii from the Philippines. SD, on the other hand, is referring to his experiences on his family's fishing boat.]

SD: What part I stayed? I stay Cebu place. And then, we go fishing. The one they call Bohol. The other island, that one. You got to go over there. Far, you know. Just like [the distance between] Honolulu and Hawaii [Big Island]. And then, you go fishing in the middle. (Chuckles)

WN: When you was on President Lincoln, what kind food you ate?

SD: Oh, good eat, boy! Good eat, inside the boat. Any kind. You can eat any kind, you know. They bring you, over there. But sometime, you vomit too much. You know, the boat, it go like this [SD rocks hand back and forth]. You throw out, huh? Even all you ate, it come out, and you hungry again. That's why plenty guy make. Because you no can stand, throw out. You throw out in the Pacific. (Chuckles)

WN: What other things you did on the President Lincoln?

SD: No, only, you know. . . . They give you kaukau, like that. Time for kaukau, everybody, they give kaukau. Get cookman, eh? Pākē cookman, over there. That's why, yeah, good. Good, if you stay in

the Pacific, it's good. You can eat any kind.

But when you reach Hawaii, that's the time you realize yourself. I cry, you know. That time I reach in Honolulu, I cry, because I remember, my house, I no work hard. You see? More worse, that time I reach in Papaaloa [Plantation]. The cut cane, hāpai. Ninety-five pounds, you must carry to bring the flume. But if day work, all right, because it's easy, only. But contract, you must work hard, so you can make money. Hard. I tell you, before, hard. Not like now. No more one dollar, one hour, now. Over ten dollar, one hour, some. You, I think, you no work five dollar, one hour, I think. That's why, now, good. Time for keep the money, now.

WN: When you arrived Honolulu, where you stayed?

SD: I stay in immigration [station]. After that, I think, we stay over there one week, I think. Because I remember, [before] they bring us out, we play indoor ball over there. But we win all the time, eh? That's why, (chuckles) the guy--the boss over there--every time, he call us, "Go ahead, go play." After that, I think, two weeks, we stay over there. And then, they bring us Papaaloa Plantation.

WN: Papaaloa or . . .

SD: No, no. No, Onomea Plantation. I think, Onomea, no more two year, though. Because 1923. . . . Yeah, I think, no more one year, I think. I moved Papaaloa.

WN: Oh, okay, so you went Onomea, yeah? How come they assigned you Onomea?

SD: No, you can move. You can move if you like move. Because same, plantation. Yeah, before, only they ask you, "Where you come from?"

"I come from Onomea," like that. They give you job. Because they like men, working there.

WN: So, at Onomea, what kind house you lived in?

SD: All kind house. You know, already, the working guy, only. . . . Yeah, good house, but kinda. . . . Yeah, good house. Even Honokaa, good house.

WN: At Onomea, you had day work or contract?

SD: No, I work day work, I think, about two months. After that, I go contract. Cut cane. Cut cane, hāpai. And then, we can make dollar half, that one.

WN: From what time to what time you worked?

SD: Six o'clock [a.m.]. Come home, 6 o'clock [p.m.].

WN: Same as Philippines, then?

SD: Philippine Islands. In the Philippines, if you work your own job, up to you what time you pau hana. But you work railroad, like that, 3 o'clock [p.m.], you pau hana. We start about 7 o'clock [a.m.]. Because that one, all day work one. Easy job, you know, railroad work. But only 75 centavos. You understand that 75 centavos? (Laughs)

WN: But plantation in Hawaii, you work 6 o'clock to 6 o'clock?

SD: Yeah, yeah, yeah, before. Now, no more. Before, dark yet, you stay in the ground already--the yard--waiting for the truck . . .

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

WN: After one year Onomea, you moved Papaaloa, yeah?

SD: Yeah, I moved Papaloa. After that, 1927, I think, I moved Kona. Come Kona.

WN: While you was at Papaaloa, what kind work you did?

SD: Papaaloa? Cut cane. Cut cane, hāpai.

WN: Same kind as Onomea? Same kind job?

SD: Yeah, same kind job. No more another kind job, before. Anybody, even students, like that, you gotta go cut cane. Pilau, you know, before. Before, more hard. One dollar a day, oh. But lucky thing, before, the rice cheap. Sometime, only three dollar, one bag, before. But now, almost \$50, one bag.

WN: Papaaloa, where you bought your rice from?

SD: The store. Japanese store. Over there, you can order anything. That's how, the plantation, before.

WN: You had bangō?

SD: Yeah. No, if you go order to the outside store--Japanese store--no need bangō. [They] just take your name. But you go plantation store, [you need] bangō. That's why, good. Yeah, before, I surprise, you know. How come? Before, [you buy] the kaukau, beer, and [make] small money, but you can save money. Now, [you make] plenty money, but hard time for save the money. Because the kaukau,

ho, see? Before, I tell you, quarter, bakalaw, you no can eat three time. You buy, one dollar, one bag bakalaw, before. Now, you think you can buy bakalaw [for] quarter? No 'nough, you, one kaukau. That's why, hard now. But, like you folks, you can get good job, because you get experience already. But like us, old already, ah, pau. Almost make. That's why, we get Social Security. If no more Social Security, hard. But me and my wife, only \$240. But lucky thing, I bin sell my land ma uka. Every month, they pay me \$235.

WN: You sold your land?

SD: Yeah, I sold my land, four acre, for \$48,000.

WN: So, Papaaloo, you cooked your own food?

SD: Oh, yeah. I cooked my own. Over there, no more cookman, I think, unless you go Japanese house. Eat over there. Pay by month, eh? But Filipino no more.

WN: You cooked your own?

SD: No, Papaaloo, I ate, Japanese house. Ishizu, the name. But at Papaikou. . . . No, not Papaikou . . .

WN: Onomea?

SD: Onomea. I cooked my own. Papaaloo, the Japanese cook. That's why, I understand Japanese. Because, mostly, they talk in Japanese. Now, any kind, Japanese talk, I understand. You no can talk kolohe to me. (Chuckles) I know. (Chuckles) That's why, before, she call me [to] kaukau.

(SD raises voice, imitating a woman.) "Severo-san, gohan tabenasai." [Please eat your meal.] (Laughs) Beer--sake. "Shigeru-san, nominasai." [Please drink.] You know, good Filipinos drink little bit, so you can eat plenty. "Nominasai," I understand. (Chuckles)

WN: How much you paid them for cook your food?

SD: Before, \$15 [a month], you know, before. Because the rice cheap, huh? But, you know, Japanese, they know to cook, eh, any kind. That's why, not bad.

WN: How many people she cook for?

SD: I think, us, including his boys, I think, ten men, though. From Philippines, five men. Over ten men, get plenty boys, eh? But good.

WN: What about your laundry? Who did your laundry?

SD: Her. Her, the one was my cook. But you pay by month, eh? Three dollar, one month, I think.

WN: Three dollar, one . . .

SD: Cheap. Yeah, cheap, you know. So, good. To me, if like now, if all same before, the kaukau little bit cheap, now the money [wages] little bit high, you can get money. But now, same thing. Same thing, even how you work. Because the kaukau cost plenty now.

WN: How much money you saved?

SD: Every month. Before? Oh, yeah, because I make, sometimes, \$75, you know, for one month. But I pay my cookman \$30. I got little bit. I pay the laundry, everything, I got over about \$25. Of course, that time, because cheap, everything. You buy, cheap. Not like now. Because hard, eh? Especially if you are not member to the union, you no can work, you know. That's why, like now, I'm citizen already, maybe I can work [for] the county, like that. But no more time already. I'm old already. I got 76 [years] already.

WN: Okay, you was at Papaaloo between 1923 and 1927, yeah? In between those years. Nineteen twenty-four had one strike, eh? Filipino strike?

SD: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. I stay Hilo about three months, I think--no, two months. And then, I go back Papaaloo, [but] I don't work. Only I stay homestead.

WN: Homestead?

SD: Yeah. I stay over there. After that, everybody, they come back for work, yeah, I come back Papaaloo, work.

WN: How come you went Hilo?

SD: Oh, because they bring Hilo, the strikemen, before. The Filipino strike, before, they bring Hilo. All, they bring Hilo. After that, I was thinking, hard time already, more better I go back Papaaloo, [but] not plantation. I stay only outside--the homestead land. I work homestead. So, we got enough kaukau, eh? Because if you no more job, you stay the strike place, ah, pau. You make-- (laughs) no more kaukau over there. Yeah, hard, you know.

WN: So, you went Hilo? For little while?

SD: Yeah, I went Hilo about two months, I think.

WN: Where you stayed in Hilo?

SD: Oh, I stay Beamer Block. Beamer.

WN: Beamer?

SD: Yeah, the haole. We stay over there. After that, I go back Papaalooa.

WN: How come you stayed with him?

SD: No, that house, belong to Beamer. That's why, you see, Beamer Block. Waiakea. Waiakea Town. That's where we stay over there. After that, I was thinking, kinda hard time already. I was thinking mo' betta go back Papaalooa Plantation. I go back over there--no, Honokaa Plantation. I go back over there, I stay homestead. I no work plantation yet.

WN: Papaalooa, not Honokaa, eh?

SD: Not Honokaa. Papaalooa. I stay homestead. I no work plantation. If the homestead get job, yeah, I work. But not plantation. Because somebody, he know that you work plantation, he kill you, you know. The striker. That's why, you gotta watch out.

WN: So, during strike, you never get involved?

SD: No. That's why, that time, kinda hard. Especially if you get kid, oh, I pity the kid, strike time. I pity the kid. Cry like hell. No 'nough kaukau. He ate only sweet guava. Yeah. That's for real, I tell you.

WN: Strikers ate only guava?

SD: Yeah, ate only guava, some people. That's why, before, strike time, hard. Not like now. Now, all right, because the union. . . .

WN: When you came back Papaalooa, you lived homestead?

SD: Yeah. I come back Papaalooa, I lived homestead. Before the strike no pau. The time it pau, I go back work. The plantation. Because if you go back work, still strike yet, you gotta watch out.

WN: Oh, scab, yeah?

SD: Yeah. That's why, before, hard time, boy. Us, hard time, before.

WN: Who was the leader of the strike?

SD: Pablo Manlapit from the Philippines. I don't know if he still alive. Make already. Oh, I tell you true. The time we like go inside the Olaa Plantation, everybody, they use (chuckles) this kind red cloth, over here.

WN: Red armband?

SD: Yeah. Because if you like go inside over there, that's fight

already, that one. But lucky thing, some army, they watch in the middle of the. . . . Olaa, Waiakea. No can pass. So, everybody come back. From that time, that's the time I think to go back the Papaalooa.

WN: You was going work at Olaa?

SD: No. Everybody, the strikers, everybody like go inside over there, go huki the one no go strike. They like make 'em strike. But no can go inside because the army, they watching over there. Yeah. That's why, I go back in Papaalooa. I think that, ah, this kind, no can do nothing. Then I go homestead. I work in the homestead. If single, all right. But if you get wife, get kid, hard time. Pity the kids to cry. Hungry.

WN: So, the policemen, they wouldn't let you folks go inside Olaa?

SD: Yeah, police and the soldiers, they (chuckles) was standing over there. You no can go pass over there. Yeah, the policemen stay watching over there. That's why, the strikers, they go back the town. They no go. . . .

WN: Oh, they no let the strikers go inside?

SD: Yeah, no can. They no can go inside. Because big trouble, go inside. That's why, us, get all red kind over here, you know. So, if trouble already, he know each other. The one, he get mark, he know each other--your partner, that one. The one no more mark, ah, lick 'em. But lucky thing, they told us go over there. . . .

WN: The one who had no more mark, they was the. . . .

SD: Lick 'em if no more mark.

WN: How come?

SD: That's enemy.

WN: Oh, scab?

SD: I mean, when us, time for go Olaa Plantation, we put mark. So, no can mistake, huh? That's why, go over there. Bumbai, fight already, if no more mark, two guy no more mark, only fight each other.

WN: So, you was on the side of the policemen?

SD: [SD misinterprets question.] Yeah. But, us, the policemen stay watching in the middle, the road. Nobody can pass. Policemen and army stay watching over there. Nobody can pass. They send 'em back. If they no send 'em back, they go inside, ah, big trouble, already. Not like now. Now, all right. The union. . . .

WN: Before you came Kona, what you thought about your plantation life?

SD: Oh, I tell them, plantation hard. Kona, before, good, you know. That time, little bit high, the coffee [prices] yet, eh? Good. Make one dollar, one bag. You make three bags, you got three dollar a day. Three dollar. But that time they get 40 cents a bag, 50 cents a bag, that's the time hard time.

WN: When was that?

SD: The coffee cheap, huh? Nineteen thirty-one was, I think, that time.

WN: Oh, the depression?

SD: Yeah. Nineteen thirty-one. If I no mistake, 1931.

WN: Nineteen twenty-seven, you pau with Papaalooa?

SD: Oh, yeah. Nineteen twenty-seven, I pau with Papaalooa. And then, I moved Honokaa. No, no, no. Yeah, yeah, I come Kona.

WN: Yeah, Kona?

SD: Yeah, yeah. I come Kona.

WN: Okay, the next time, we go talk about when you came Kona, okay?

SD: Yeah, yeah.

END OF INTERVIEW

Tape No. 9-58-2-81

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

with

Severo Dinson (SD)

January 26, 1981

Kealia, Kona, Hawaii

BY: Warren Nishimoto (WN)

WN: This is an interview with Mr. Severo Dinson. Today is January 26, 1981, and we're at his home in Kealia, Kona, Hawaii.

Okay, last time, we were talking about when you were in Papaaloa Plantation. In 1928, you decided to come Kona, yeah, Mr. Dinson? How come you came Kona?

SD: Because the plantation too cheap, they pay. Hard time. That's why the coffee was three dollar a bag, that time. I think I go make money, that one. But after that, pau season--pau coffee, well, that's the time, hard time already, because no more steady job, you see? After that, I go train up the boxing. Train up the boxing, I think, '28--'29, I fight already, that one. I fight Red Watai. I fight Red Watai, that time, in Kona. I draw, that one. I no win, I no lose. Draw.

WN: Who you wen fight?

SD: Red Watai from Hilo. That one from Hilo.

WN: Okay, I going get into your boxing little bit later, but first, you was working sugar plantation, yeah? What was good about Kona? How come you left Papaaloa? How come you came Kona?

SD: Oh, because Kona, that's more easy job, eh, for picking coffee. But Kona, good only for season time. But no more season, hard time, because no more job. Only hō hana, no 'nough for eat in Kona. If during season time, all right, you can make money, little bit. But no more season, no can make money.

WN: Season time, you can make better money in Kona than in sugar plantation?

SD: Oh, yeah. Sometime, I make ten bag. Ten bag, six bag, yeah. But two dollar, one bag, before. But after that, the other year, he come down dollar quarter [\$1.25].

WN: Oh, what? Depression, you mean?

SD: Yeah, dollar quarter [\$1.25], one bag. And then, 1931, he hit 40 cents a bag (chuckles), you know--before, 1931. That's why, [in 1937] I bin tell my wife, "I think this kind no 'nough for us to eat." Because I got three kid, eh, that time.

And then, my wife told me, "Ah, mo' betta we go back plantation, work over there. Because we get free house and free doctor. So, I think mo' betta." That's the time we moved to plantation again.

After that, that time we moved in the plantation, I stay Camp 11 in Honokaa. We stay over there about 1930--'30, no? Yeah, 1930, we stay over there until 1948. After the war, I come back over here. How many year that time?

WN: Not 1937 you went Honokaa?

SD: Nineteen thirty-seven [1937], I moved Honokaa. But this one, you know, go back and forth.

WN: Oh, you went back and forth between Honokaa and Kona?

SD: Kona, yeah. Because, before that time, I was single yet, eh?

WN: So, season time in Kona, you would pick coffee?

SD: Yeah. Season time, I go back over there, pick coffee. After that, no more work, I come back over here.

WN: You come back Honokaa?

SD: Honokaa. Yeah, I come back Honokaa.

WN: You do that every year?

SD: Yeah, but that time I married, I never come back already.

WN: After you got married, in 1935, you never go back and forth?

SD: No, nail 'em already. (Laughs) No can go away.

WN: Before you came Kona first time, who told you about Kona? Who told you, you know, you can make good money in Kona?

SD: Nineteen twenty-four, you know, was that strike time. Before, 1924, strike, eh, the plantation. So, somebody told me mo' betta go Kona, because over there, get job picking coffee. So, you no more hard time. That's why, I know in Kona good. That's the time I come in Kona. I know that time, Kona. But before, you get tobacco place. But only coffee time, all right. You can make money little bit. But if no more, hard time, you know. Hard time.

You find job, you go Japanese place. "Oh, ō-san, shigoto aru ka?"
[Old man, is there work?] (Laughs)

WN: That's how you found job? You went to each farmer to ask for job?

SD: Yeah, you got to--not like plantation. You got to ask. Like here, you got to ask. "Papa, you got hana hana, ka?" [Papa, you got work?]

"Ah, hana hana, nanbo demo aru, but zenī nai do, nai do." [There's as much work as you want, but there's no money you know, no money, you know.] (Chuckles) That's why, that time hard, you know.

But one thing, Kona, that's the best, because nobody grumble you if you no go hana hana. Like plantation, morning time, [SD makes knocking sound] "Hoy, hana hana!" See, even though you tired. "Hana hana!" You got to go, because they kick the door, you know. That's why hard. That's why, during wartime [World War II], I stay Honokaa. After that, I come back over here. I buy land already--coffee land already. And then, I buy this place. This is my own land, you know. Five acre, this one.

WN: So, when you went from one farmer to another, how you know what farmers to go to?

SD: No, the owner only near, eh? Like this one, one farmer over here, the other side. . . . No owner one place, you know. Only about five acre; the other one, about ten acre; the other one, ten acre. That place you pick, pau, you got to ask somebody [else]. Because no more steady job, you know. One thing, only that one, the Kona, you know.

WN: How many days you pick for one farmer?

SD: Oh, until finish his place. If his place pau, you got to find the other farmer. No more steady, one man, you know. Me, in Honalo, I pick Nishimoto place. This Fujii. And I forget already that Japanese down there. Plenty, you know, over there, I pick. That's why, everybody know me over there.

WN: Honalo side?

SD: That's why, I no can forget over there. (Chuckles)

WN: Where you lived in Kona?

SD: Oh, we rent house. That time I make the pool hall, I leased that pool hall for live. Big house, you know. Big store, that one, before.

WN: You leased that house? Rent?

SD: Yeah, I rent, because I lease. I pay the lease. Five year, I pay

the lease over there. No, you know, before, when you stay Kona, if you single like, you got to stay [at] the Japanese house--the owner of the coffee land. You will stay until you finish his place. If that one pau, no more coffee already, you got to find someplace, you going stay their place. Because no more camp, you know. No more camp. That's why, you got to go here and there.

WN: So, the farmer let you stay their place?

SD: Yeah, you got to stay their place. They get house, you know. Every farmer, he get house.

WN: About how many days you stay with one farmer?

SD: Oh, that one, no can tell until they finish.

WN: About one week, two weeks?

SD: No, no, no, no, no. Sometime, five month, two month. Because when they ripe again, you know, one round, eh? For example, you start from here. That one, you no can pau about one month, finish about five acre, like that. And then, when finish that one, you go around already, you come back [to] that place you start. Until you finish. If that one finish, three time, you know. Three time, go back and forth. Then, after that he finish, you must think for find job again someplace, because no more job, him, already.

WN: After season pau?

SD: Yeah, after season pau. Sometime you find hō hana, only hō hana, but only kaukau. No more pocket [money].

WN: So, one season, you work for one farmer?

SD: No. Sometime, three farmer, you got to go. Because, some, only three acre, like that. The three acre no can make two month, like that. Make pau that one, you got to find someplace if you like make money. Good, before. But one thing--hard time for make money.

WN: How the farmer pay you? He pay you cash?

SD: Oh, yeah. Pau round, the coffee, he pay you cash. But they charge you the kaukau. You order that for kaukau, yeah, he give you. Bumbai, pau already, payday already, well, they count how much you borrow and like that. Before, good. Japanese, good. Yeah, Japanese good, you know. You work [for] the Japanese, good.

WN: You stay inside the Japanese farmer house or you stay in another house?

SD: Before, no more house get for rent, we stay all the time the farmer

house. But the time, Nakamoto, they get house for rent, eh, that one. That one, before, house, you know, over there. That's the time, we rent the house.

WN: Oh, you rented one house?

SD: Yeah. And then, nobody kick you. You work or not, nobody kick you.

WN: About how many pickers the farmers hired?

SD: Oh, sometimes, you get five men. Depend how many acre you got.

WN: Say, for three acre farm, about how much?

SD: For three acre farm, two men is enough. But you get ten acre, like that, five acre, you got to hire about five men. Because one man, they cannot keep up to the one acre for pick. When ripe time, oh, boy.

WN: So, when you worked in the field, the farmer tell you, "Hurry up, hurry up"?

SD: No, no, no, no, no. Because contract. They pay by bag. Yeah, they pay by bag. He no tell you, "Hurry up, hurry up." Only they look your coffee if good. Because if green one, he picks up, he go talk to you that you no pick this one, you no pick this one here.

WN: If you pick too many green kind, he tell you . . .

SD: Ah, pau. He kick you out. (Chuckles) He kick you out.

WN: You know anybody who got kicked out?

SD: Ah, no. (Chuckles) Good, you know, that time before--picking coffee, eh? Good. But one thing, cheap, the coffee.

WN: You got two dollars, one bag?

SD: Two dollars, one bag. But bumbai, he come down, he rate one dollar, one dollar quarter [\$1.25]. After that, he come down more down--40 cents a bag. That's the time, I was thinking, for go plantation. Bumbai, no can kaukau. Yeah, 40 cents a bag. Yeah, hard. That's why I move plantation.

WN: How many bags, one day, you pick?

SD: Sometime, I pick five bags. Only myself, I pick five bags.

WN: Hundred-pound bag?

SD: Yeah, yeah. Hundred pound. Because easy. Easy to pick. Because

the coffee [trees], before, short not high.

WN: Off-season time, you asked the farmer if you can work all year around? You know, get other kind jobs, off season, hō hana . . .

SD: Oh, yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Because that place you work, he tell you if you like contract that one, hō hana, like that. We work, because bumbai, you no more rice--kaūkau. Yeah, that one, we work one place for a while, like that.

WN: How you got paid for that kind?

SD: Oh, them, the one, they pay.

WN: They pay you by one hour pay?

SD: No, no, no, no. By acre. Sometime, they give \$10 one acre. By acre, not by hour.

WN: What was better pay? During coffee season or off season? When you got more better pay?

SD: During coffee season, because plenty job, eh? Hard, before, Kona. No season time, yeah, hard. But during season time, oh, boy.

WN: Get plenty?

SD: (Chuckles) You know, before, over here, good, because good fun only for. . . . But that time I married, oh, we pick, me and my wife, 12 bag. Twelve bag, but 80 cents one bag.

WN: So, you got married 1935, yeah?

SD: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Nineteen thirty-five.

WN: Some farmers, they wen pay better than other farmers?

SD: Ah, Japanese, he no pay high, high. All same. Yeah, Japanese no all say [to] Filipino, "I give you ten dollar, I give you eleven dollar." No, Japanese, cooperate. Yeah, all, all same. You no can tell that, "You come my place because I give you this and that." No. Japanese cooperate. (Laughs)

WN: So, if one farmer had three acres, another farmer had six acres, they pay same thing?

SD: Yeah, same thing. Any place, same thing. Yeah, same thing. Dollar quarter [\$1.25], dollar quarter, every place, dollar quarter. But, you know, if you picker, you look if plenty ripe coffee, all right, you go over there. No can hold you, because you only stay their place. You go here and there, look the ripe one, this and that. That's why, one thing, Kona, no more steady job, hard.

That's why, now, lucky. I get my own place. I stay my own place. Like me, now, old already, hard, you know. I get sick, what? I go welfare? No, no, no. I no like. (Chuckles)

WN: When you got paid by the farmer at the end of contract, when contract pau they pay you, but they subtract for food? They take away for food?

SD: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. If you charge them for the food, well, when they pay you, that's the time they hemo everything--how much you owe to them.

WN: What else they take away? I mean, they take away food and what else they take away?

SD: Only the food. How many money you borrow. But good, because you no need borrow. Because every month he pay, eh?

WN: Every month, he pay you?

SD: Yeah, every month, he pay. Or else, if you no more money, you tell them that, "Oh, I like money because I got no more money," they lend you. Yeah, they lend you. The Japanese good (chuckles). The Japanese good, I tell you. But, you know, one thing. If you no more steady house, kinda hard. Like now, I'm old already. If I no more own house, what? You got to go welfare. Me, I tell you true. This not bullshit. You can ask my wife. You can ask the welfare office. I got ten kid, but no one cent, welfare, they help me.

But, before, I was in Honokaa. The welfare office lady, she told me, "Dinson."

"What?"

"They get new house over there. Mo' betta move over there. I help you go pay."

"No, no, no, no, no. I no like. I no like. This house not for me." I no go. But they make all new house already, but I no go.

WN: The people who came pick was mostly Filipinos?

SD: Yeah. Most Filipino. Yeah, mostly Filipino, but some Puerto Rican, little bit, only. And Hawaiian. Really, Hawaiian not like Filipino and Japanese. They like make money. (Chuckles)

WN: Filipinos and Japanese like make money, you mean?

SD: Yeah, they like make money. Even me. Me, I tell you, morning time, about 5 o'clock, I stay in the coffee land already. Especially plenty ripe, oh, I stay the coffee land already, pick the coffee. That time I married, my wife, she stay sleeping yet, I stay coffee

land already, picking coffee. And then, when my wife, she come down, that's the time we make ten bag, eight bag. But I go home late, too, you know.

WN: What time?

SD: Ah, if can see yet, the coffee, I stay in the coffee land yet. Good, that one, before, we can make. . . .

WN: What about when you not picking? You know, when you bachelor, free time, what kind things you did? You had any leisure time to do other things besides pick coffee?

SD: No, no. No. Only pick coffee. No more different kind job. Because if you stay the Japanese house, you stay over there because you pick coffee. You no can do something over there. Only pick coffee, you. If the coffee pau, well, up to you. You move.

WN: You were saying that the off season, no more too much jobs, yeah? So, about 1928, you started to box?

SD: Boxing. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

WN: How you started boxing?

SD: Train up. That time, yeah, we practice over there--Konawaena School. And then, after that, '29, that's the time we start fight.

WN: How you learn how for box?

SD: Oh, I know already from the Philippine. That time I come Hawaii, I know already. That's why (chuckles), I no scared. Yeah, from Philippine, I know, you know. In fact, that time, we come this side, the boat I ride, get one boxer--Philippine. So, I practice to him. He like he bring me up. He no like I come Hawaii. Said, "Mo' betta you go Mainland." He say, "Good fight, though." That's why, I was thinking, ah, I get chance, can do boxing. But one thing, small money. Only 10 percent. Oh, if like now, boy, I tell you, big money, you know. But now, only 10 percent, 11 percent. You fight about six rounds, seven rounds, like that.

WN: Eleven percent of what? The gate receipts?

SD: Yeah, yeah, yeah. That's why, hard, too, that time, boxing. If like now, ah, big shot already. (Laughs)

WN: When you was boxing was depression time, eh?

SD: Yeah, yeah. Yeah. That's why, I tell you too cheap. Even the boxing, small money.

WN: Where you boxed? Where people came to see you box?

SD: Get plenty people, the Konawaena School. Bumbai, go down Hilo, the stadium. Bumbai go Maui. All same. Hawaii Loko, over there. Fight over there.

WN: Where you went? Maui?

SD: Maui. I fight Hawaii Loko. I stay Lahaina, Maui.

WN: "Hawaii Loko"? That's the guy's name?

SD: No, Hawaii Loko, that the place.

WN: Hawaii Loko? Lahaina?

SD: Lahaina. I stay Lahaina. That's all I fight, that one, over that one, over there.

WN: You was with some organization? Any kind group? Boxers?

SD: No. No. Only somebody take me. The one, the policeman in Lahaina, before. He's my manager.

WN: Oh, yeah? What was his name?

SD: Delfin. . . . I forget the second name already. Make already long time.

WN: Oh, a Filipino guy?

SD: Yeah. He was policeman in Lahaina.

WN: But what about in Kona? Who wen manage you in Kona?

SD: This Julian Yates. Julian Yates, that's my. . . . Yeah, Julian Yates.

WN: Julian Yates, the politician?

SD: Yeah, yeah.

WN: He was manager?

SD: Yeah. But make already, Julian Yates. He was manager.

WN: What kind training schedule you had?

SD: Oh, that, jump rope, spring. Yeah. Before, nothing. Only 100 pound up to 150 iron, like that. Easy, you know.

WN: Lift 150 pound?

SD: Yeah. But that's why, now, kinda hard. Before, you do like that.

WN: You train every day?

SD: Yeah, every morning. Run. That time I stay Lahaina boy, I tell you, that one, hard training, though. Hard training.

WN: How long you stayed Lahaina?

SD: About three month, I think, I stay Lahaina, the time I fight. I stay three month, but, you know, already, here and there.

WN: So, you wen box only when not coffee season, yeah?

SD: I fight. The coffee season, I fight, because I get boss already. He call you, you got to go. I don't know if you know Mr. Bennett? The boss---the promoter at Hilo. That's the one. Sometime, he call up.

WN: But when you picking coffee all day, when you have time for train?

SD: No, never mind the picking coffee. You got to train up. That time, all right, because I was single, eh?

WN: With the farmer, though, you had contract, eh? Coffee farmer?

SD: No, I no more contract, coffee farmer, before, over here. I no more contract. Yeah, no more contract.

WN: But you never have to pick for the farmer?

SD: Yeah, I pick, somebody, but no contract. Up to you, you work or not. Up to you. You pick or not. If you no pick, if you stay some Japanese house, he kick you out because they need for working guy, eh?

WN: So, you wasn't staying at the Japanese man house and boxing same time?

SD: Yeah. But they no kick out me. Me good man, that's why. (Chuckles)
Yeah, good man.

WN: You mean, what? You good worker?

SD: Yeah. Yeah, before, strong, you know. Got to hāpai the bag, put inside the jackass. Me the one. Nishimoto place.

WN: You wen load the bags on the car?

SD: No, the jackass.

WN: Oh, the Kona nightingale?

SD: Yeah. (Laughs)

WN: Oh, that was your job?

SD: Yeah. Pau pick coffee, then my boss say, "Shigeru-san! Hoy. Ah, mo' betta coffee hāpai, no?"

"All right."

They no call me Severo. "Shigeru-san!"

WN: Shigeru? That, Japanese name, eh?

SD: Japanese name.

(Laughter)

SD: All the time, "Shigeru-san, gohan tabenasai yo." [Please eat your meal.] (Laughs) That's why, I understand, you know. You no can fool around, talk to me pilau kind, you know. Yeah.

(Laughter)

SD: I stay the Japanese house long time, I was single yet.

WN: What division you wen fight in? You was welterweight or what?

SD: No, I get 128 [pounds] only. What you call that one?

WN: Oh, I don't know. Who was your number one toughest fight?

SD: Red Watai. This Japanese. Japanese-Puerto Rico.

WN: Japanese-Puerto Rican? Where he from?

SD: Hilo.

WN: And you wen knock him out or what?

SD: No, (chuckles) me and him draw, draw. He's number one, Hilo, before. That's why, we pau fight, somebody told me, "You supposed to take time, you win." Well, no can help. I like get 'em right away, but no can do nothing, eh? That one, that's the easiest one, that time I fight in Maui. I fight this Speedy Garcia.

WN: Speedy Garcia was from where?

SD: Wailuku, I think, that man. Puerto Rico, you know. Puerto Rico, this guy.

WN: You fought him?

SD: Yeah, I fight him.

WN: You won or lost?

SD: I knock 'em out, number three round. Like this, you know. He too sassy, that's why, him.

WN: You ever got knocked out?

SD: No, no, not one time. Thank god, no.

WN: You no more glass jaw, then?

SD: No. No, no more. The God know what I am talking to you. Me go down not one time.

WN: You mean, no more knockdown either?

SD: No, never. Even you ask somebody over there Honalo if, you know, Dinson, people he fight.

WN: You had a nickname when you was fighting?

SD: "Cyclone" Dinson. (Chuckles) Good name, eh?

(Laughter)

WN: So, you was boxing from about 1928 to 1935, when you got married, eh?

SD: I quit 1932.

WN: How come you quit?

SD: She no like. My wife, she not like. She said, "This kind boxing, no 'nough kaukau. No can eat." Because cheap, eh? That's why, mo' betta I work. That's why I (laughs) work plantation. (Laughs)

WN: So, if you never get married, you would still . . .

SD: Ah, yeah. Even Mainland already. If I no married, I sure I go Mainland. One haole like bring me, you know, the time I stay Lahaina. The coffee mill boss. No, I mean the mill--sugar plantation mill.

WN: Oh, Lahaina? Pioneer?

SD: He like bring me Mainland. I no like. I scared, bumbai he poison. (Chuckles) Bumbai they poison to me, what? They make me drink something. But I was thinking, married, I think mo' betta. . . .

WN: So, you quit '32 or '35? You got married '35, eh?

SD: No, '33, I quit. Yeah, we got married '35. You know, my wife, she

was single that time she come Hawaii. Because the brother, he order from the Philippine. Her and the brother, too. The old brother, Maximo Inanoria, that's the one, he order from the Philippine, because they like to go school in Honolulu. But I don't know how come they no go school. Maybe Maximo's wife, I think, she no like go school. She like work only the house. But I never see yet, that time. That time I fight in Honolulu, I go holoholo over there. Oh, I see her because I know him. This wahine, smart, you know, how to speak English. Yeah, can talk English. Was in the tenth grade in the Philippine.

WN: Tenth grade? Your wife?

SD: Yeah. Me, even one day, I no go school, you know.

WN: Your wife from Honolulu?

SD: Oh, my wife is from Honolulu. The brother stay working plantation, Waialua Plantation. And then they order from the Philippine Island. Nineteen twenty-six, I think, that time they came.

WN: How you met her? Your wife?

SD: Oh, I look over there. I wen see over there. But that's my sweetheart already in the Philippine. I know her in the Philippine, because she's my townmate.

WN: When you went Honolulu to fight, where you fought in Honolulu?

SD: Oh, stadium--Honolulu Stadium. No, no. Honolulu, I never fight. I never fight. Only Maui and Hilo, Kona. That's all.

WN: So, after you quit boxing, you went plantation, eh? Honokaa?

SD: Yeah, went plantation, Honokaa. And then, wartime. After the war, that's the time come back in Kona.

WN: When you was in Honokaa, pay was good or better than coffee or what?

SD: Oh, yeah. Better than coffee, because it's steady job. Coffee, only coffee time [season], you can make money. That's why, the time I work the plantation, after the war, I tell my wife mo' betta we go back Kona, we buy coffee land. And my wife, she agree that we come back over here. Honaunau. We stay Honaunau. And then, I buy coffee land over there. Five acre. That's the time, 1955, I sell the coffee land and I make the pool hall.

WN: So, when you was Honokaa . . .

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

WN: So, how come you like come back Kona when you was still Honokaa?

SD: I like Kona because easy job. Not like plantation, you hoe the grass. Kona, easy job. That's why, that's the time I came back; I bought the coffee land. Not buy the land, only lease.

WN: In 1948, who you lease from?

SD: In Kona? Oh, that time, I bought that place, he get house.

WN: No, but who had the land before?

SD: Oh, this Steven Ponce. Philippine. I buy \$1,100, the five acre. The lease.

WN: How come he like sell to you?

SD: Well, they get business, eh? They get pool hall in Honaunau. That's why, nobody take care the coffee land. That's why they sell to me.

WN: The \$1,100 you got, how you made that much?

SD: Ho! Plenty way. (Laughs) Yeah, we make money that time. I bin sell \$5,500. I buy only \$1,100. You see? And then, we get the coffee; we sell the coffee. That's why I bin bought the pool hall, because I thought more easy job, eh? Ah, I think, no can buy bread. That's why, I bin tell my wife, "Ah, quit that kind."

WN: On the coffee land, you wen have any kind milling equipment or anything?

SD: Yeah, I got for hemo the skin, eh?

WN: The pulper? You had that?

SD: Yeah, I get. The coffee land, I got.

WN: What else you had?

SD: Not for ready for drink. No, only for hemo the skin. Yeah, I got. Just like somebody over there. But now, mostly no more, because the coffee mill, he buy, eh?

WN: They buy the cherry?

SD: Yeah. But before, no more. We got to grind, myself.

WN: What else you had besides the coffee grinder?

SD: Oh, the one there, it's like mill. You know, big kind, eh?

WN: Oh, you had the drying platform, too?

SD: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah, get complete. That place over there, my Honaunau ma uka, I buy 11 acre, that one over there. Oh, they get big coffee place, you know, for grind. Get big house, too.

WN: Ponce had all that before?

SD: Yeah, yeah, yeah. The Japanese owner, that one, before. But I mistake only that one, little bit. If I no sell, me big shot already, I think.

WN: If you no sell? But you sold 'em, though?

SD: I sold 'em.

WN: How come you sold 'em?

SD: No, I buy this land [SD's present land]. Mo' betta, eh? This my own land already. The other one only buy lease. Only I buy lease. That's why, mo' betta, we sell that one and then we pay all this one one time. So, my own place already, see?

WN: This house now is your own?

SD: Yeah. This one, now, my own. If this one, me, no more, ah, pau already. I got to go welfare, I think.

WN: So, who you sold coffee to?

SD: Oh, the coffee mill.

WN: Which one?

SD: Before, Fujino, he buy my coffee. That one, he buy all the time, my coffee, before.

WN: What about the big kind mill like Captain Cook?

SD: Before, only dry [parchment] one, the one they buy. But even Fujino, the dry one, already they buy. Him the one, they clean, eh? They grind; they clean. But us, only hemo the skin and dry 'em. Bumbai dry, well, the coffee mill, he go and buy that one.

WN: Fujino was one coffee mill . . .

SD: Yeah, yeah.

WN: . . . or one store?

SD: No. I think that's the brother, that one. But the one coffee mill, the one Fujino. Now, Kainaliu, he got coffee mill over there.

WN: Kainaliu? Oh, the new one?

SD: No, ma uka side. Yeah, yeah. Not new one, that one. Long time, that one. I don't know. Maybe haole go buy that one now. Fujino good guy, though.

WN: You hired anybody to help you pick?

SD: Oh, yeah. No can keep up. Only me and my wife, no can. Oh, the nice place. Plenty ripe. That's why, you get your own place, like now, you stay the coffee land yet. As long can see, ah, you got to keep up, pick. Because if fall down and you go pick up from the ground, ah, (chuckles) this hard, you know. Yeah, hard.

WN: How many people you hired?

SD: Three people, I hire. Because, before, I get plenty friend, eh? This boxing. . . .

WN: Boxing friends?

SD: Yeah. They come my house. They stay my house. They help pick coffee.

WN: You paid them?

SD: Yeah, I paid. Got to pay by bag (chuckles).

WN: So, 1948, about how much you was paying for one bag?

SD: Nineteen forty-eight, I think, dollar quarter [\$1.25], though. Dollar quarter, I think, that time, 1948. Yeah, yeah, dollar quarter.

WN: Before, when you came Kona first time, you was picking, yeah? Then, later on, you bought land and you was farmer. Which one mo' betta?

SD: Oh, yeah, you get your own land, better. Because nobody boss you. If you go work to somebody, you got to follow what kind he order to you. He told you, "Severo, you go over there. You pick over there." If you own land, you go hire somebody, you the one boss (chuckles). Yeah, before, I hire plenty people, though. That time I got the 12 acre in Honaunau ma uka, I hire plenty. And they get house. That's why, I tell you, if I no sell that one, kind of. . . . (Chuckles) I mistake. I mistake, I sell that one. If we wait until now. . . . That's why, hard luck.

WN: Who you sold 'em to?

SD: Japanese. That's why, because somebody told me they like sell this one, eh? That's why I bin sell.

WN: So, your 12 acres, Honaunau, how much you sold 'em for?

SD: Mm, that cheap, boy. Only \$3,000. Now, even \$30,000, somebody buy. Even lease. You buy lease now, some \$40,000. Especially that one now. They get [macadamia] nut place, eh? He get five acre nut place, you know. That's why, that one, I mistake. If I no sell that one, ah, the nut all big, you know. That's why no can help. Hard luck, that kind.

WN: That 12 acres land, who owned the land?

SD: That one belong Bishop [Estate]. Yeah, belong Bishop, that one. But before, Japanese, he lease from Bishop. But that time the Japanese, he like sell. When he wen tell me, "Dinson, you like buy my coffee land?"

"Why? You like sell?"

"Yeah, I like sell."

"How much?"

You know, but mistake. Because the Hawaiian, they like buy only \$1,000 the 12 acre, you know. Before, the coffee cheap like hell, eh? Cheap.

"Oh, the Hawaiian, he like buy \$1,000, but one thing, they no pay cash."

"All right. I give you \$2,000. I pay you cash." That's why, yeah.

WN: So, you gave him \$2,000?

SD: Yeah, I gave him that day. But this one already, that's my land already, this place.

WN: You're talking about this [Kealia] land or Honaunau land?

SD: No, somebody keep this land. Already I buy this one. Already, I buy this one. The one, Honaunau one, the lease only, that one, I buy.

WN: Yeah, yeah, yeah. You're talking about that land, eh?

SD: Yeah. That land, yeah.

WN: Two thousand [dollars]?

SD: Two thousand. But this one, \$9,000.

WN: You told me you bought lease from one Ponce?

SD: Oh, that one, the down one. The ma uka one, that's Japanese owner. That time I sell my pool hall, that's the time we come back over here, that's the one I buy.

WN: Oh, okay. So, when you came back--Honokaa, you came Kona, you wen buy from Mr. Ponce?

SD: Yeah, Ponce.

WN: Ma kai land? How much? Five acres, you bought?

SD: Five acre. That's \$1,100.

WN: Then, you sold that land?

SD: Yeah, I sold that land.

WN: For how much?

SD: (SD asks wife.) Five thousand, no?

Mrs. Dinson: Yeah, \$5,000.

WN: And then, you started the pool hall in Honalo, 1955?

SD: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

WN: How much you bought the pool hall place for?

SD: No, that one, only I lease.

Mrs. Dinson: We buy the [pool] table.

SD: The table, only, we buy. Only I lease that. Before, store, that one.

WN: Oh, used to be one store?

SD: Teshima Store. I think he get Teshima Store. Now, that place, before . . .

Mrs. Dinson: Ushijima.

SD: Oh, yeah, yeah. Ushijima.

WN: He owned the. . . . ?

Mrs. Dinson: The time you leased the place, then we buy the table.

SD: Yeah, we buy the table the time we leased that place.

Mrs. Dinson: That time we make a business for pool hall. What you think? Long time, that's why.

SD: Forget, though.

WN: But only last not too long, yeah, the pool hall?

SD: No, I think, about one year, I think.

WN: How come no last so long?

SD: Ah, no can make money. No can buy bread, that kind. That's why I tell my wife, "Ah, mo' betta sell 'em, that bugga."

WN: How come? Nobody came play pool or what?

Mrs. Dinson: Sometimes.

SD: Yeah, only sometime. Because during busy time, coffee, nobody go play.

Mrs. Dinson: You know why? Got the bowling alley. That's why, mostly, the young boys go over there. Play at the bowling alley.

WN: Oh, the bowling alley? So, how much money you lost all together, pool hall, you think?

SD: I don't know. I think lose, that one. No make money, eh, lose. No come back, I think.

WN: After that, you bought the coffee land?

SD: After that, I bought the coffee land. I bought this one.

WN: This place, now?

SD: Yeah, this place. We note, you know. We borrow money through the Bishop. And then, I tell my boy for stay over here. And then, we buy that ma uka Honaunau. That time, yeah.

WN: Okay. You was Kona Filipino Association president, huh? You no like talk about that?

SD: (Laughs) Not good story, that one. (Chuckles)

WN: You say you was plantation, and then you was coffee picker, then you was coffee farmer, and then you was pool hall businessman, yeah? Of those, which one you like the best?

SD: Ah, the coffee.

WN: Coffee farmer?

SD: Yeah, the coffee farmer is the best. I like the coffee farmer. That's why, that time--because this one belong to [Sam] Liao, this place--that time Liao, he come, he told me that they like sell this place. So, I tell my wife, "Ah, how we can buy? Us, no more money." Oh, I think over, I think over, bumbai, ah, mo' betta we mortgage to the credit. Yeah, we mortgage the credit, this one. And then, I pay Liao by year. Thousand dollar, a year. Ho, we work hard for pick coffee so I can make thousand dollar one year. But the gods, they help me, so we get 'em, this one.

WN: So, coffee farming was best?

SD: Coffee farmer, that's the best.

WN: You lived Philippines; you lived Honokaa; you lived Kona. Which one the best place?

Mrs. Dinson: Kona.

SD: Kona, that's the best. Kona is the best.

WN: How come Kona the best?

SD: Because, you know, any kind, no more trouble. Over here, all the good men. And plenty fruit, any kind. If you no more money for buy the fruit, just only holoholo your kaukau (laughs). You get free. Yeah, as long you no bring home. Only kaukau there, but. Yeah, I think. Kona is the best. Anyplace I go, when I come back, I got to come back Kona. You must think that I stay plantation-- [Onomea], Papaaloa, Honokaa. . . . Three plantation, eh? But this one the best. Kona, the best. I like Kona. Just like in the Philippine, already. Better than Philippine. (Laughs)

Mrs. Dinson: No boss . . .

SD: No more boss. You the one boss yourself. As long you got rice, no worry. Like now, I got my own land. I got my own house. If no more this one, what? They humbug. You no more house for stay, you got to go welfare. Welfare, they help you. That's why, good. I try my best, so nobody can talk to me.

WN: Okay, well, I think that's all. So, thank you very much.

SD: 'Nough, 'nough? Tired already. (Laughs)

END OF INTERVIEW

A SOCIAL HISTORY OF KONA

Volume I

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**Ethnic Studies Program
University of Hawaii, Manoa**

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